



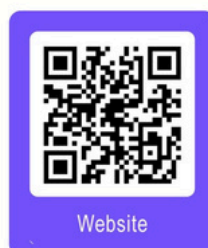
A word about Minnehaha Master Gardeners: We are volunteers trained through the South Dakota State University Extension [Master Gardener Program](#). The mission of MMG is to enhance and supplement community educational efforts of the SDSU Extension Master Gardener Program and to provide research-based education and information on horticulture and environmental stewardship. For more information on becoming a Master Gardener, visit [SDSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer program](#)

Stay in touch with Minnehaha Master Gardeners' news: [on FaceBook](#), [our website](#), or [email us](#).

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Find out more about us!





Pepper Plant Problems

Carla Goetsch, Master Gardener

Most of us love the taste of peppers, whether snacking on them raw or using them in cooking.

Peppers originated in Central and South America about 5,000 years ago. Peppers can be sweet or hot and come in many colors, including green, yellow, orange, red, purple, and even brown. Growing peppers is usually one of the first vegetable choices to try.

Our growing season is too short to plant pepper seeds outside, so seeds should be started indoors in March, or transplants should be used from a garden center. Peppers do not tolerate cold springs and are considered a warm-season vegetable, so wait until mid to late May to plant transplants outside.

There are a few problems that affect yields, such as:

Stunted Growth - cause: too cool early in the season, too little sun or nutrients. Fix: 8 hours of sun a day, well-drained soil, wait to plant until overnight temperatures are above 50 degrees, and use of a balanced fertilizer. When first planted, the peppers should be hardened off.

Lots of Foliage but Few Flowers - cause: too much nitrogen in fertilizer. Fix: add more phosphorus to encourage more blooms.

Yellow Leaves - cause: usually overwatering or poor drainage. Fix: Add more compost to the soil to lighten it and improve drainage. If a garden area is in a low spot that does not drain well, consider converting it to a raised bed.

Leaves Curling and Drooping - cause: heat stress, underwatering, or waterlogged roots. Water when the top 1-2 inches of soil are dry, and apply mulch around the plant to reduce heat and temper moisture swings in the soil.

Flowers Dropping Off - cause: temperatures above 90 degrees desiccate pollen before it can fertilize, causing bloom drop. Peppers do best at 75-85 degrees. Fix: a light afternoon shade, using a phosphorus-rich fertilizer, and garden practices to encourage pollinators.

Small, Deformed Peppers or Blossom End Rot - cause: inconsistent watering, incomplete pollination, or potassium deficiencies. Fix: Balanced fertilizer and a consistent watering schedule with mulch around the plant.

Pests and Diseases - causes: blight, leaf spot, or pests of aphids, grasshoppers, or mites. Fix: Plant rotation to avoid planting in the same spot as other nightshades the previous year. Water at the base of plants rather than overhead watering. Insecticidal soap can be used to treat pests.

Turning Good Intentions into Success...

Houseplant Series, Part 4: Plants That Prefer Consistency

Pam Conklin, Master Gardener



Some plants are adapted to survive difficult conditions. Others are adapted to avoid them.

Peace Lily, Chinese Evergreen, and Parlor Palm evolved on the floors of tropical forests, where temperatures remain relatively stable, sunlight is filtered through a canopy of trees, and moisture is consistently available. Their strategy isn't to endure drought or neglect—it is to make the most of dependable conditions.

Because light is limited beneath a forest canopy, these plants have developed broad leaves that capture as much available sunlight as possible. While this adaptation allows them to tolerate lower light indoors, it also means they lose moisture more readily than plants with thick, waxy, or succulent leaves.

In nature, these plants solve the problem of limited light by maximizing their ability to collect energy.

Peace Lily (*Spathiphyllum* spp.) produces large, dark-green leaves that efficiently capture filtered light.

Chinese Evergreen (*Aglaonema* spp.) has beautifully patterned foliage and is among the most adaptable tropical houseplants.

Parlor Palm (*Chamaedorea elegans*) grows slowly beneath taller vegetation, bringing a graceful, architectural form to indoor spaces.

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Houseplant Series, Part 4: Plants That Prefer Consistency

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Care at a Glance

- Light: Low to moderate indirect light
- Water: Keep soil lightly and consistently moist
- Soil: Well-draining but moisture-retentive
- Temperature: 65–80°F
- Humidity & Airflow: Moderate humidity preferred; avoid cold drafts and heating vents



Common Problems

Brown leaf tips often indicate dry air, inconsistent watering, or salt buildup from fertilizer. Yellowing leaves can signal overwatering, while drooping leaves may indicate either thirst or root problems. Carefully checking soil moisture before watering can help distinguish between the two.

How to Help Them Thrive

Think like a rainforest.

Place these plants where they receive bright, indirect light and are protected from drafts. Water when the top inch of soil begins to dry, and consider grouping tropical plants together to create a slightly more humid microclimate.

These plants reward consistency. Their lush foliage softens indoor spaces and brings a sense of calm that reflects the forest floors where they evolved.

Extension Insight

Many popular houseplants originated as understory plants in tropical forests. According to Extension resources from North Carolina State University, University of Illinois, and Clemson University, plants such as Parlor Palm, Chinese Evergreen, and Peace Lily are naturally adapted to filtered light conditions beneath taller vegetation. Their broad foliage helps capture available light, making them excellent choices for bright, indirect indoor locations.

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/chamaedorea-elegans/>

<https://extension.illinois.edu/houseplants/chinese-evergreen>

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/peace-lily/>

Next month: We'll leave the forest behind and explore plants adapted to bright light and drier conditions, including Aloe, Jade Plant, and Echeveria—masters of water storage and survival in sunny environments.



How to Correctly Re-Use Potting Soil

Candy Van Dam, Master Gardener

Old potting soil doesn't have to go to waste. With a little prep work, last season's mix can support healthy plants again — and save you money in the process.

Inspect Before You Reuse

Start by removing any dead roots, debris, and clumps from the old soil. Check for signs of pests such as fungus gnats or mealybugs, and discard any soil that smells rotten or shows mold. Diseased soil should never be reused, as pathogens can linger and infect new plants.

Refresh the Nutrients

Potting mix loses nutrients quickly. Blend the old soil with about 25%–50% fresh compost or a slow-release granular fertilizer to replenish what's been depleted. You can also work in a

small amount of perlite or vermiculite to restore drainage and aeration, as these tend to break down over time.

Pasteurize If Needed

If you suspect pests or disease but still want to salvage the soil, pasteurize it by spreading it on a baking sheet and heating it in the oven at 180–200°F (82–93°C) for 30 minutes.

Store It Right

Keep unused, refreshed soil in a sealed container away from rain and freezing temperatures to preserve its structure until you're ready to plant.



ABCs of Gardening: I-M

Bonnie Lynch, Master Gardener

The following article is a reprinted series from 2008-2009.

I is for Invasive Plant – A plant that is inclined to spread more widely and rapidly than a gardener would like.

J is for Journal – A record, written or electronic, where a gardener keeps track of garden plans, soil test results, plants selected, dates of planting, fertilization, hours of sunlight, garden tasks, harvest information, and anything else related to garden activities over a period of time. Keeping such a record can assist in planning for the following seasons and can determine which plant selections are best for a specific location.

K is for Kernel – The inner portion of a seed (usually applied to an edible seed) or the central part of a nut or fruit seed.

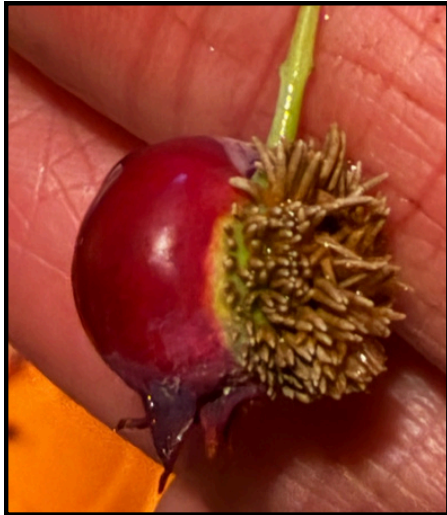
L is for Loam – Good quality soil is a complex mixture of minerals and organic matter that is continually changing its physical, chemical,

and biological properties. Often categorized as “heavy” or “light,” soil is composed of clay or silt particles (fine in nature) and sand particles (coarse in nature). Clay soils pack together closely and make penetration of water and air slow and difficult. Sandy soils have air spaces, allowing water to drain freely. In loamy soil, adequate supplies of clay, silt, sand, and organic material are present. Loamy soil is crumbly to the touch and ideal for gardening.

M is for Mulch – An organic soil covering that is placed around plants to help maintain a desirable soil temperature and to prevent the evaporation of moisture, the freezing of roots, and the growth of weeds. Mulch improves soil fertility and structure, reduces pest and disease damage, prevents erosion, and can even enhance crop flavor. Any kind of coarse, well-decomposed organic matter works: leaf mold, grass clippings, aged sawdust, pine straw, ground bark, shredded leaves, and aged stable bedding (straw).

Serviceberry Rust: Don't Panic

Pam Conklin, Master Gardener



Photos by Pam Conklin

Serviceberries (*Amelanchier*) are valued for their spring flowers, edible fruit, and brilliant fall color. They are considered extremely low-maintenance, adaptable, and virtually indestructible.

When my tree sprouted leaves after being chewed down to sticks by rabbits the first winter after I planted it, it was a testimony to the serviceberry's resilience. But now, my tree displayed a new and unusual growth on a few of its small, red berries.

Research matched the issue to cedar-quince rust, a fungal disease that alternates between serviceberries and nearby junipers or eastern red cedars. Infected fruit often develops tan, spiky projections and may become deformed or drop prematurely.

Fortunately, the disease rarely threatens the health of an established tree. Management focuses on sanitation—removing infected fruit and pruning affected twigs—and maintaining good tree vigor.

If your tree is infected with cedar-quince rust, there are generally three approaches the homeowner may consider:

1. **Do nothing.** This is what many homeowners choose, me included. The tree survives, wildlife gets most of the fruit, and some years are worse than others.
2. **Sanitation.** Remove any obviously infected fruit, and rake up any dropped fruit. This won't eliminate the disease, but it can reduce some fungal pressure.
3. **Preventive fungicide programs.** These are usually only worthwhile if someone is growing serviceberries primarily for a reliable fruit crop. They have to be applied at specific times in spring before infection occurs, not after symptoms appear. Because spores can travel long distances, removing nearby junipers may not eliminate the problem.

For science-based guidance, see the [University of Illinois Cedar-Quince Rust Fact Sheet](#).

Also, check out this article:

<https://www.mushroommonday.com/post/serviceberry-rust-gymnosporangium-spp>